

PREMIUM-CLASS TRAVEL ACCOMMODATIONS

1. REASON FOR ISSUE: To revise Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) travel policy for the use of premium-class travel accommodations by VA employees purchased with appropriated (i.e., VA) funds and/or funds donated from a non-Federal source. VA's policy on premium-class travel supplements the travel regulations issued by the General Services Administration (GSA) in 41 Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) Chapters 300 - 304, also known as the Federal Travel Regulation (FTR).

2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES

a. This policy supersedes related guidance found in MP-1, Part II, Chapter 2, dated February 28, 1995.

b. Eliminates sections that are already located in the FTR.

c. Requires VHA Network Director/Chief Officer, VBA Area Director, NCA Director of Field Programs or Associate Director, and Assistant Secretaries to review premium-class requests forwarded by local approving officials.

3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE: Charge Card Oversight and Travel Policy Service (CCO & TPS) (047E3), Office of Financial Business Operations, Office of Finance.

4. RELATED DIRECTIVES AND HANDBOOKS: VA Handbook 0631.3 and other VA Directives and Handbooks in the 0631 series.

5. RESCISSIONS: MP-1, Part II, Chapter 2, paragraphs 8f, 8g, 8h, 8i, line 1m of Appendix A, and Appendix L (in its entirety), dated February 28, 1995.

CERTIFIED BY:

/s/
Stephen W. Warren
Acting Assistant Secretary for
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**BY DIRECTION OF THE SECRETARY
OF VETERANS AFFAIRS:**

/s/
Rita A. Reed
Acting Assistant Secretary for Management

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PREMIUM-CLASS TRAVEL ACCOMMODATIONS

1. PURPOSE. The purpose of this directive is to revise policy for the use of premium-class travel accommodations in connection with official Government travel.

2. POLICY. Coach-class accommodations are the standard mode of transportation for all VA employees on official travel. Use of premium-class (first or business) accommodations must be authorized in advance of travel unless extenuating circumstances or an emergency situation made advance authorization impossible. Travel requests must be submitted 30 days in advance of travel. In the absence of advance authorization for the use of premium-class accommodations, travelers must report their use of premium-class travel and request post-authorization/approval from appropriate approval authority (see sub-paragraphs 2a through 2d (2) below). Failure to request post-travel approval will result in the traveler bearing the difference between the cost incurred for premium-class and coach-class accommodations.

a. Airline Accommodations

(1) The use of premium-class accommodations purchased at VA expense requires advance authorization from the Assistant Secretary for Management (ASM). The use of first-class accommodations obtained through personal expense, including redemption of frequent travel benefits, requires no approval.

(2) Length of travel time, including time for layovers or change of planes, is not sufficient justification for using premium-class accommodations. Long-distance travelers and their supervisors will make every effort to accommodate a rest period en route or at destination before an employee starts work. Likewise, return travel accommodations should include a rest period insofar as it is practical unless the traveler can return the day before a regularly scheduled day off.

b. Helicopter Service. The use of helicopter service requires advance authorization from the ASM.

c. Train Accommodations

(1) The use of first-class accommodations on Amtrak Acela requires advance authorization from the ASM.

(2) The use of the lowest class of service available on Amtrak Acela (including Acela Express) only requires local approval. *NOTE: The Amtrak Acela Express' lowest available accommodation is business-class. The Amtrak Regional's lowest available accommodation is coach-class.*

d. Ship Accommodations. The use of ship accommodations beyond "lowest first class" requires advance authorization by the ASM.

e. Travel Funded by a Non-Federal Source

(1) Regardless of mode of transportation, the use of first-class accommodations funded through a non-Federal source requires advance authorization from the ASM.

(2) Regardless of mode of transportation, the use of business-class accommodations funded through a non-Federal source requires no further agency approval as long as the donated funds cover the entire cost of the ticketed fare and is paid in advance of travel. If donated funds do not cover the cost of the ticketed fare, or will not be paid in advance of travel, advance authorization is required from the ASM. *NOTE: Acceptance of funds from a non-Federal source still requires approval per FTR 304 and VA policy.*

f. Rest Stops/Periods. A rest stop/period en route or at destination is not authorized when a traveler is authorized premium-class accommodations.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES.

a. Assistant Secretary for Management (ASM). The ASM is responsible for the development, implementation, and oversight of travel policy within the Department. The ASM shall establish the policy and procedures for managing the use of premium-class travel accommodations. The Charge Card Oversight and Travel Policy Service (CCO & TPS) (047E3), Office of Financial Business Operations, Office of Finance, will carry out these responsibilities under the direction of the ASM.

b. Administration Chief Financial Officers (CFOs) or Staff Office Equivalents. The Administration CFOs or staff office equivalents are responsible for implementing and managing premium-class travel policy within their respective organization. They have delegated authority to issue operational procedures to supplement VA Handbook 0631.3, and shall establish procedures to implement management controls for the use of premium-class accommodations and ensure that adequate internal controls are established and followed.

c. VHA Network Director/Chief Officer, VBA Area Director, NCA Director of Field Programs or Associate Director, and Assistant Secretaries. Review all requests for the use of premium-class travel accommodations forwarded by authorizing officials.

d. Facility Directors, Supervisors, and Authorizing Officials. Review all requests for the use of premium-class travel accommodations, ensuring all justifications are within acceptable VA criteria and comply with established VA procedures.

4. REFERENCES.

a. GAO Report to Congressional Requestors (GAO-07-1268) dated September 2007, PREMIUM CLASS TRAVEL, Internal Control Weaknesses Governmentwide Led to Improper and Abusive Use of Premium Class Travel.

b. OMB letter dated January 8, 2008, Use of Premium Class Travel.

c. Title 41 C.F.R., Chapters 300 – 304.

5. DEFINITIONS.

- a. Coach-class: The basic class of accommodations offered to travelers regardless of fare paid.
- b. Premium-class: Any class of transportation service above coach, e.g., business-class or first-class.
- c. Rest period: Duration of rest not to exceed 24 hours at either an intermediate point en route or at the destination and must allow for appropriate overnight lodging. Begins upon arrival at the lodging accommodation and ends at departure from the accommodation.
- d. Rest stop: See rest period.